

The benefit and advantage of afflictions to mankind in general, particularly to those, who make a proper use of them, by causing their affections to sit loose, and indifferent, to the world, and by fixing their minds steadily, and immoveably, on God,

Considered in two

DISCOURSES

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By the Rev. Mr. THOMAS SMITH,

Preacher of the said Sunday Morning Lecture, and likewise of
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To which are added,

Some Considerations on the Immortality of the Soul; and
Remarks on several Parts of the Discourse.

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PSALM CXIX. ver. 71.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn God's laws.



HERE men but as ready to survey their own actions, and examine them without any prejudice in their favour, as they are to censure the divine dispensations, or to accuse the Deity of rigidly treating his creatures, they would soon be convinced that the evils they feel; and those they have the greatest reason to fear, generally result from their own ill conduct, or the want of due submission to providence. Men are so poisoned with the tempting fruits of sin, so bent upon gratifying the demands of depraved appetites, and the precipitant motions of a froward will, (the leading faculty of the soul,) that they become regardless of their own safety, and fearless of affronting infinite majesty. By stupidly neglecting their own preservation, and contemptuously rejecting the divine care, they either run wilfully into the ways of danger, or daringly provoke the great preserver of men, and never failing defender of his people, to scourge them

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with

with the sin-revenging rod of his justice, and make them feel the weight of omnipotent displeasure. Afflictions indeed, are such severe things, that of them we most heavily and bitterly complain, for they probe the painful wounds of sin, grievously alarm the inmost thoughts of our hearts, and give us such black ideas of misery and sorrow, as level our spirits with the dust, and render us unable to support ourselves, or to endure the strokes of the divine chastiser. But notwithstanding our deplorable grievances, and that we labour under such mournful circumstances; the noxious disease of sin is so infectious, and human nature is become so untractable, that severity is made absolutely necessary; and therefore except sharp remedies are applied, and all proper methods used to hinder the infection, they seldom cure the distemper, or effectually answer the gracious purposes, and merciful ends of our heavenly Father. For no sooner are the evils withdrawn, and our afflictions intirely removed, but our rebellious appetites are in motion; and instead of vigorously obstructing their progress, and devoutly celebrating the divine clemency, for the removal of our sufferings, we instantly return to our follies, and fix our minds on those very things, which occasioned our misery, cause us to break our good resolutions, and most solemn vows of amendment. And though we are made sensible of our dangers, and that this scene of vanity, which the world (a) presents us with, has cheated

(a) This world is beautiful to the eye, and magnificently grand in appearance, but when we come to handle it, it hath
no

ed and deceived us times without number, yet the promises we made in our extremity, and that were extorted from us by sickness, we often forget in the time of health and strength, not from any defect in the divine visitation, or want of skill in our spiritual physician, but from the power of licentious appetites, which have turned us from the holy commandment, to serve divers lusts, and sinful pleasures. So forcible are the evil powers of sin, so prone are our natures to rebel, that even afflictions which are so very efficacious in themselves, and will work most powerfully upon us, when nothing else can take any effect, or make the least alteration in our evil dispositions; may by being disregarded, rendered ineffectual, and we intirely loose the benefit of them. But alas, if Providence removes its afflicting hand, and we imagine ourselves out of danger, the sinful pleasures of life seize our minds, and we are daily projecting new experiments, and constantly inventing various kinds of diversions, to divert our melancholy leisure hours, and to silence the tormenting accusations of conscience, but all our recreations are in vain, and our most artful de-
vices

no substance or solidity in it at all. The world, as the prophet says, is deceitful upon the weights, and altogether lighter than vanity itself. O miserable world, saith St. Augustine, whose griefs are real, but thy delights counterfeit and empty; thy sorrows and sufferings sure, thy pleasures uncertain, thy pains are permanent, thy comforts transitory; thy toils insupportable, thy rewards poor and despicable; thou promisest with all the profuseness of a prince, but payest with all the indigence of a beggar; thy miseries are pure and unmixed, and without any abatement; thy happiness tempered and allayed with all kinds of misery. See Dean Stan: Christian Directory.

vices to no purpose. For when we have accomplished our wishes, and gratified every animal passion, our pleasures insensibly slide away from us, our finest schemes suddenly come to nought, and our minds are as restless and as uneasy as ever. So frail are men, so inconstant are their purposes, that unless they are arrayed in the armour of light, and divinely enabled to oppose the powers of darkness, they will never be able to maintain their ground, or to resist the frequent violent assaults, and overpowering sollicitations of flesh and blood. It is mens fond attachment to earthly delights, and to the carnal amusements of sense, which so captivates the faculties of their souls, that they are no longer master of themselves, but ignobly pursue a round of slavish pleasures, which render them utterly averse to devout meditations, and wholly incapable of spiritual, and rational employments. Sensual indulgencies, inwardly corrupt mens natures, and take up so much of their time, as makes them disregard the final end of life, and the important and awful business of eternity. When the delights of sense seize the affection, and men are led by false deluding objects, they seldom limit their vicious desires, but are so intensely exercised by unrestrained passions, that they spare no pains to gratify, if possible, these undisciplined, and unbounded appetites. The force of which wicked resolutions, darken the understandings of licentious creatures, and hardens their hearts to such a degree, as makes them to glory in their shame, and reproachfully to depend on such things which can never satisfy rational, and immortal beings. As doatingly fond

as men are of diversions, and the deceitful appearances of things, they may as soon quench their thirst with the image of a fountain, as make their souls happy, with the sordid pleasures, and vain customs of this sinful world. Earthly delights are so fallacious in themselves, so wonderfully mutable in their natures, that instead of reviving our hopes, or supporting our poor fainting spirits, they depress the powers of our souls, and will by an immoderate use of them, greatly embarrass our minds, cut out work for sad and bitter reflection. When the will is grown refractory, and inveterate habits of sin are cherished, men grow so confirmed in evil customs, that they ignominiously sacrifice their time to vanity, and become irreconcilable enemies to themselves; and to their own peace and happiness. Thus transported by the power of blind passions, and obstinately determined to pursue criminal practices, no expostulations will soften their hard impenitent hearts, nor the most passionate and melting entreaties, change their evil and inflexible dispositions. Indeed conscience is so faithful to its trust, that it frequently interrupts mens fancied tranquility; which gives them some disturbance: and the blessed spirit of God, is such an invariable reprovcr, that it constantly witnesses against their evil proceedings; yet these secret admonitions are not regarded, and these powerful reproofs very little heeded. The governing powers are asleep, and those only awake, that should be suppressed. There is such an insensibility upon the mind, and such a deadness to spiritual and eternal delights, that the ravishing charms of virtue, make

no impressions, the beauty of holiness shines in vain, and the most cogent arguments prove ineffectual, the strongest inducements are not sufficient to engage the ear, and corporeal recreations have so influenced the affections, that a crown of life, when put into the balance, will not weigh down the lightest pleasure. Thus familiar with earthly delights, men stupidly neglect their spiritual concerns, wantonly play upon the smooth precipice of sin, and carelessly walk in an imaginary security, without any sense of their danger, or that the slippery path they tread, leads to the horrible chambers of death, and hastens them to the depths of destruction. But notwithstanding the perverseness of such infatuated creatures, as audaciously despise God's merciful intimations, and the more milder methods of his providence, yet in the day of God's fierce wrath, and when the divine hand presseth them sore, it will remove the gross stupidity of their minds, and open such a passage to the heart, as will discover their most secret vices, and make them know by painful reflection, how grievously they have been imposed upon, by the specious wiles of satan, and the dreadful snares of sin. Under these pungent sufferings, and that terrible confusion within, men commonly regret their past follies, and feel the stinging reproaches of guilt, for their drowsy consciences are awakened, and their understandings enlightened, which makes them not only utterly to abhor their former ill conduct, but also to experience, the vanity of all terrestrial enjoyments, and that there is no true satisfaction for the soul but in God, who is an eternal spring of love, and
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an (*b*) inexhaustible source of goodness. Since afflictions are of such advantage to us, as to make us to see wherein our main interest consists, and where our true and real happiness lies: let us not yield to enormous practices, or refuse to acknowledge God's righteousness, in justly condemning us for our faults, and punishing us severely for our obstinacy, but endeavour to make a right use of our afflictions, and exert our best faculties, to acquire his favour, whose sharpest corrections proceed from love, and are always tempered with kindness, and mingled with mercy. Were we deeply affected with the divine benignity, and the various ends of providential dispensations, our fears would be greatly allayed; and we should be comforted under the severest trials, be carried through the several difficult stages of life, with a degree of real joy and inward consolation. Let us then by attentive reflection, and by detesting every false way, labour to strengthen our feeble

B powers,

(*b*) Agreeably to which, says the great, and good archbishop Tillotson, Did but men consider the true notion of God, he would appear to be so lovely a being, so full of goodness, and of all desirable perfections, that even those very persons, who are of such irregular understandings, as not to believe there is a God, yet could not (if they understood themselves) refrain from wishing, with all their hearts, that there were one. For is it not really desirable to every man, that there should be such a Being, as takes particular care of every one of us, and loves us, and delights to do us good, as understands all our wants, is able, and willing, to relieve us in our greatest straits, and to preserve us in our greatest dangers, when nothing else can? Is it not every man's interest, that there should be such a Governor of the world, as really designs our happiness, and hath omitted nothing that is necessary to it; as would govern us for our advantage, and will require nothing of us, but what is for our good, and yet will infinitely reward us, for the doing of that, which is best for ourselves?

powers, with the balmy dews of purifying grace, that we may not be foiled by temptations, nor ruined by the egregious folly of impatience, but vigorously endeavour to follow our divine Jesus, and act agreeably to God's covenant of mercy: for unto them that fear thy name O Lord, shall the sun of righteousness arise, with healing in his wings, to comfort those that mourn in Sion, and clothe them with the garments of salvation. Would men but abandon the unworthy gratifications of sensuality, and not render the divine admonitions abortive, nor suffer themselves to be blinded with prejudice, they would clearly discern the benevolent purposes of heaven, and the munificent designs of God's righteous government, even in the appointment of afflictions, and in making those evils, which men have brought upon themselves, the means of preventing their eternal ruin, and of forwarding their present and future happiness. So that whenever we are resigned to God, and do not distrust the divine veracity, but stedfastly rely upon God's sacred promises: the vanity of earthly dependencies will be removed, our fondness for this vanishing region abated; and we shall build all our hopes and expectations on him, who is the supreme good, and consequently the proper rest, and center of our immortal souls. By thus intirely depending on the divine providence, and fixing our hopes on the divine all-sufficiency, the anguish of our minds will be relieved, the sorrows of our hearts removed; and we shall be so sensible of the divine clemency, that we shall not doubt of the divine protection, but that God will be

be our constant shield, and buckler, and our present help in time of need. The Lord liveth, saith the psalmist, and blessed be my strong helper, God will help us when we are unable to help ourselves, and comfort us when all human comforts fail, when the skill of the physician is baffled, when medicines have proved ineffectual; and there remains no hopes of our recovery, God will raise up our drooping spirits, with the strength of his all-powerful arm, and the animating rays of his heavenly countenance. So that in these dark and dreary moments, in these last feeble (*d*) efforts of nature, when the vessels of life are

(*d*) Whilst I was meditating on our last dissolving moments, and the racking unwillingness of frail sinful creatures, to have their souls stripped, of their earthly covering, of those vehicles of organized matter, and to pass into an untried state of existence. The words of dying Adrian occurred to my thoughts, and the horror his spirit was in, at the near approach of inexorable death, and its final separation from the body.

Poor, little, pretty, fluttering thing,
Must we no longer live together?
And dost thou prune thy trembling wing,
To take thy flight thou know'st not whither?
Thy pleasing vein, thy humorous folly,
Is all neglected, all forgot?
And, pensive wavering melancholy,
Thou hop'st, and fear'st, thou know'st not what.

Here lyes the sting, suppose there were no other, to be thou knowest not what, and go thou knowest not whither, not for a year, or for any certain period of time, but through the immense and boundless ages of eternity. These doubts, and perplexities are greatly removed, and our hopes and expectations, rationally supported by Christ Jesus, who hath brought life and immortality to light, by the preaching of the gospel, and by clearly revealing, and displaying God's love to mankind.

are so touched, that we perceive death has mortally wounded our vitals, and that judgment hastens us to its tremendous bar, if we are prepared for

Was revelation entirely silent about this matter, would we but attend to our directive faculties, or hearken to the voice of unprejudiced reason, we could not, from the natural order of things, and the present government of the world, imagine, that the benevolent author of our beings, placed us here only to indulge our bodily appetites, to make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof, to load ourselves with thick clay, and to be buried under the ruins of it; to pursue a vapour, and hunt a shadow for a few days, and depart into the land of perpetual darkness, where all things are forgotten; have we any reason to suppose, that we came upon no higher design, than only to converse with objects of sense, to be at such pains for the support of a body, as cannot, with all our labour and care, be preserved many years from dust, and rottenness. I say, had we any room to suppose, we were sent into the world, for such an idle purpose, we should have reason to expostulate with our Maker, and reply to the great author of our beings, in the words of the psalmist, "Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain." But reason and revelation assure us, we were not sent upon such a trifling errand, or that we were to play like the Leviathan; but that this life is designed to prepare us for, and introduce us to a better; and unless it be considered in this light, and as a passage to the next, it is hardly possible, to reconcile the present state, and the seeming unequal distribution of things, with the goodness and wisdom of the divine ruler, and faithful guardian of the universe. Could such a beneficent creator, such a righteous governor of the world, have given us reason and reflection, with unbounded prospects, and desires, with respect to futurity, and eternity, with innumerable doubts, and anxieties from thence arising, at the end of this perplexing life, to shut up the scene in death, and resolve the same into particles of dust? No: God who is the constant preserver of his people, and infinitely good to all his creatures, will never desert the work of his hands, or refuse to gratify those ardent desires, those vehement expectations of some more durable, and more happier state, which his goodness hath implanted in holy souls, and his love so amazingly stirred up, and so efficaciously excited within them. For these breathings after his
blissful

for the important change; and patiently submit to the awful summons, God will graciously uphold our fainting spirits, with the divine influences of his efficacious grace, and the reviving hopes of a blessed and glorious eternity. And therefore however grievous our calamities are, considering the infinite advantages they produce, and how much we are spiritually benefited by them, we have no reason to reproach the divine severity, or object to the righteousness, and justice of (e) Providence.

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blissful presence, and longings for an everlasting habitation with him, are but the energy of his own breath, and an emanation of his own eternal life, which God would not, so kindly have rooted in our breasts, nor have given us such rational hopes, of possessing the glories of the heavenly Canaan, flowing with never-ending and unbounded pleasures, had he intended to frustrate our wishes, or that the soul should perish with the body, and sink into the deep, and dark abyss of non-entity. Besides the many grievous calamities, lengthened out by the memory of what is past, and the fears of what is to come, cannot be fairly accounted for, if this world be not a state of trial, and there be not a retribution afterwards. Why were we so made, that the remembrance of certain past actions, create in us grief, fear and horror, which neither the tyrant, nor politician, can free himself of, if our Creator had not formed us accountable creatures, by giving us such ideas of guilt, and punishment, even for the most secret crimes, and most retired from human eye. But waving all further considerations of futurity, whatever scruples men may entertain about it, natural light clearly informs me, and sufficiently convinces me, that after I have quitted this clayey tabernacle, and am entered into some unknown region, whatever I be, or wherever I am, I am safe in the hands of God, and that no power can endanger my safety, or deprive me of the divine care, and protection. See this argument finely handled in *Ld. Shaftsbury's Rhapsody*, *Bp. Cum. de leg. nat.* *Mr. Wollaston's delineation*, *Mr. Smith's Select Discourses*.

(e) To suppose that the almighty and infinitely wise governor

On the contrary, we should humbly bewail our manifold transgressions, and devoutly adore the supreme disposer of all, that from a grateful sense of the divine care, and God's beneficial visitations, we may be induced to cry out, in the moving, and pathetical language of the psalmist, that it is good for us to be afflicted, that we might learn God's sacred laws, and obedience to all his holy precepts. In treating of these words, I shall pursue the following method, shew first the advantages of afflictions in general, secondly, what those laws were, which David learned the knowledge of, by being afflicted: and lastly, draw such inferences from what has been said, as tend to make us patient under sufferings, and to improve our minds in spiritual knowledge; and in heavenly wisdom. And first, I am to shew the advantages

vernor of the world, who can do what he will with his creatures, has ends of acting any ways, inconsistent with their general happiness, must needs be a very uneasy and uncomfortable reflection, to every truly good and benevolent mind; but to look upon God, as the tender father of his creatures, as in all his actions towards them, not excepting those of judgment, and vengeance, consulting the general happiness, is to represent him to ourselves, under a notion the most amiable, and lovely that can be imagined. Separate infinite goodness from all mighty power, and perfect knowledge, and the idea is only awful and terrible, but that these are necessarily and inseparably united, in the glorious author of our beings, renders him the object of our most delightful contemplation, as well as of our highest reverence. That the governor of the world is the best, as well as the greatest of beings; is the support of a good man under all his troubles; this is his only comfort, and joy, under all the evils he endures, and observes in this present state. This is his most powerful motive to his duty, and gives him the greatest delight and satisfaction, in acts of obedience, and in internal devotion. See a treatise of divine benevolence.

vantages of afflictions in general: afflictions how-
 ever dreadful in themselves, or disagreeable those
 unpalatable draughts may be, were the causes of
 them impartially regarded, and the ends for which
 they were sent duly observed, instead of accusing
 the Deity of rigorous treatment, or charging our
 follies wholly upon the weakness of nature, we
 should admire the insufferable insolence of man;
 and stand amazed at the inconceivable goodness of
 God, who hath delivered our souls from death; and
 rescued us from the brink of many a precipice,
 which we through ignorance, or inadvertency, did
 neither apprehend, nor fear: for soon after man
 was created, and invested with powers to discharge
 his duty, to enable him to answer the sacred pur-
 poses of heaven, and reflect with pleasure on the di-
 vine perfections, he instead of meditating on these
 divine excellencies, and generously displaying the
 blessed effects of divine love, yields to the subtle
 suggestions of the serpent, proclaims open war
 against his Maker, and employs those powers,
 his divine benefactor endowed him with, in di-
 rect opposition to his will, and in contempt of
 his authority. By thus perverting the use of his
 faculties, by frequent repeated acts of hostility,
 he daringly defies the glorious majesty of God,
 and draws upon himself all those evils, that are the
 dreadful and natural effects of sin, and the certain
 and fatal consequences of man's disobedience. But
 notwithstanding these manifold, and reiterated
 provocations, the goodness of our creator is so
 stupendously great, and his tender bowels so
 touched with compassion, that he pities the mis-
 eries of his rebellious creatures, is so desirous of
 removing

removing their evils, and hindering them from pursuing their own ruin, that upon their humble submission to him, he receives them with the open arms of his mercy, and succours them with the energy of his heavenly grace. So that instead of appearing as a rigorous judge, or as one instantly ready to execute vengeance, he illustriously displays the endearing character of a father, of an infinitely wise and good being, who not only forgives the offences of his children, but will, upon their unfeigned repentance, convert their calamities into blessings, and make them the instruments of promoting true piety and solid virtue. Would men give themselves time for sober reflections, and often seriously meditate, on God's forbearing mercy, they would not accuse him of severity, even in the darkest scenes of life, but humbly acknowledge their own inflexibility; and that no expedient is more likely to bend their reluctant wills, or to make their virtues shine more bright, or more conspicuous than afflictions. The evils we are liable to, and often groan under, not only manifest the sacred lustre of holiness, put us upon thinking what we are, where we be, and whither we are going, but they also make us walk more warily, to consider ourselves as pilgrims, who are passing through a perilous wilderness, and travelling apace to that state, in which there are no more changes, and from whence we shall never more return. Thus attentively considering human life, and the shifting state of universal nature, we learn the uncertainty of all-created bliss, the vanity of each mortal scene, and the necessity of trimming our lamps,
before

before our poor frail vessel is destroyed ; that we may be qualified by grace, for an habitation in glory, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Because the time past is irrecoverable, and if the present is not devoutly improved, some fatal arrow may deeply wound our hearts, and we who were formed out of the clay, and have our foundation in the dust, may fall unprepared into the cold embraces of death, be unexpectedly hurried to the grave, where our residence is already fixed, and our fate unalterably determined. Afflictions operate so powerfully on our souls, so inwardly change the sentiments of our hearts, that instead of giving way to roaming abroad, we presently call home our wandering thoughts, reduce our disorderly affections to obedience, and confine them within the sacred bounds of modesty, and the justly applauded rules of discretion. By means of which, evil imaginations are corrected, filthy images removed, the scorching flames of lust extinguished, the dignity of human nature better maintained and supported. The heart which is the source of corruption, and the fountain of all evil desires, is purged from its natural pollution, and noxious qualities ; the judgment is freed of its prejudices, and the understanding has a clear conception of things. Reason (g) that bright luminary of the soul, will
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(g) Reason, which is a ray of the divinity in man, and should be the governing principle of our actions, is implanted in the breasts of men, by the merciful father of our spirits, that it might never be afar off, or hard to be understood, but shine with a light as clear as the sun, in the midst of the firmament ; and though this bright luminary may be cloud-
C ed,

with the powerful assistance of divine aid, now with little opposition, reascends the throne, and reassumes its authority, the lower powers obey its commands, and these inferior appetites are devoted to its service. The divine image is inwardly restored, and there appears much of that order and beauty in the soul, with which it was originally endued by its creator, and which man enjoyed in perfection, while he continued in a state of innocence. The soul that was blinded with sinful lusts, clearly discerns the danger of its former condition, and the misery it must have endured, had it not been awakened out of the lethargy of sin, by the penetrating and moving voice of affliction.

When men are thus influenced by sufferings, and see through the numberless mazes of folly, and the fraudulent schemes of iniquity, instead of being anxious about things temporal, they are more concerned about things spiritual, more solicitous to preserve tranquility of mind, and to controul the sanguine demands of boisterous passions, as knowing that while perpetual discord reigns

ed, and its original force greatly abated, by the noxious fumes of intoxicating lusts, and the frequent oppositions of contending passions; yet its glorious light cannot finally be extinguished, nor its natural efficacy totally defaced by all the darkening and forcible powers of iniquity; so that nothing must be admitted for truth, that destroys the use of our rational faculties, because this were to supersede the means, and entirely set at nought that knowledge, whereby we discover truth from falshood, and genuine religion from diabolical delusion. See Bp. Stillingfleet on Idolatry, p. 556. Bp. Leng at Boyle's Lectures, p. 73. where this matter is argued more at large.

reigns within, it will be impossible for them to enjoy, whatever they may be possessed of, without. Troubles are of such an efficacious nature, as will, if constantly improved to divine purposes, not only gradually prepare our spirits for God, by bringing us to an acquaintance with ourselves, and by melting our obdurate hearts into contrition, but they also are the means, of confirming inward habits of virtue, of preventing the abuse of our intellectual powers, and arming us against the false, and seducing charms of vitiated appetites. It is clear then to every ingenuous mind, that the many severe trials providence exercises us with, are intended to hinder us from injuring ourselves, and from being misled by the powers of darkness, that we may industriously pursue our own safety, and vigorously endeavour, to secure the protection of him, who is the king of kings, and the only potentate of heaven and earth. For if God be not our comforter in adversity, and our preserver in the perilous season, and at the hour of death, we are lost and undone for ever. When men are under the rod, and deeply affected with the calamities of life, they generally have a mean opinion of themselves, and are adorned with the beautiful robe of modesty; this gives them such sweetness of disposition, as renders them utterly averse to ostentation, and to all those ambitious views, which commonly swell men with pride, and destroy that amiable grace of humility. Men tried in the warm furnace of afflictions, and thoroughly humbled for their offences, are seldom lifted

up with pride, or apt to pronounce (*b*) destruction upon others, they are too conscious of their own failings ; the remembrance of which, keeps them perpetually upon their guard, lest they should be surprized by temptations, and fall a sacrifice to those horrible, and destructive delusions.

Afflictions preserve in us awful thoughts of God, and enlarged conceptions of his incomprehensible majesty, by making us so sensible of his supreme authority, that we experimentally feel our own insufficiency, and our inability to help ourselves without the divine assistance. A just sense of these things, will make us quit all pretensions to merit, and so to renounce our dependency upon the creature, that we shall intirely trust to the mercy and goodness of our creator. Afflictions

(*b*) Let not this weak unknowing hand,
Presume God's bolts to throw ;
And deal damnation round the land,
On such I judge thy foe.

If I am right, O teach my heart,
Still in the right to stay ;
If I am wrong, thy grace impart,
To find the better way.

Save me alike from foolish pride,
Or impious discontent ;
At ought thy wisdom has deny'd,
Or ought thy goodness lent.

Teach me to feel another's woe,
To hide the fault I see ;
That mercy I to others shew,
That mercy shew to me.

Mean though I am not wholly so,
Since quicken'd by thy breath ;
O lead me wheresoe'er I go,
Thro' this day's life or death.

POPE's *Universal Prayer.*

tions when sanctified, cause that peace of mind, and that durable satisfaction, which the world cannot give, nor all its glittering temptations deprive us of. Thus armed against the counterfeit beauties of sensuality, and all the sad varieties of corporeal delights, we shall be constrained to cry out with the psalmist, *Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee. For as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God:* when men are spiritually renewed, and governed by the sublime, and unalterable dictates of truth, their minds are so full of celestial ideas, and such bright views of infinite purity, that they perceive the grossness of earthly possessions, and the inconsiderableness of every thing but God, and what tends to promote his glory, and the happiness of all intelligent beings. To such persons, the pomp and splendor of this material world, are but in little esteem; nor can such be deceived by any of its delusive charms. The grandeur of a crouded theatre, or the pomp of a numerous retinue, may dazzle the eyes of the vulgar, and cause admiration in the unthinking multitude, but neither these nor the magnificence of a palace, nor the resplendent glory of a crown, will make any impression upon them, who contemplate the shifting scenes of earthly pageantry, and the perishableness of all sublunary things. They view them not with a superficial eye, but according to their real worth, and intrinsic excellency, and without any of those false colourings, the imagination commonly brightens them with, to beguile unstable souls,

and

and to deceive unwary creatures. The pleasures of this world are disguised appearances, but the sorrows of it real, and affecting, and therefore men accustomed to troubles, and to contemplate the beneficent intentions of providence, think too deeply, and act more rationally, than to depend upon such empty and fleeting enjoyments, as not only swiftly fly away from them, but also wither like the grass, and crumble like the dust, of which they are formed. There is no stability in any animal diversions, and the sweetest sensations often prove tiresome ; for though they refresh us when we are weary, yet they weary us when we are refreshed.

Whatever happiness may attend us in a shining hour, a dark cloud soon casts a gloom over our felicity, and the pleasing phantom vanishes as in a dream, and passes away as the morning dew, at the approaching sun. All things here bear the signatures of vanity, and vanish almost as soon as they appear. Fond and vain are our hopes of life, yet we are surrounded with the monuments of death ; we see persons of all ages and all characters disappearing ! our fathers, where are they ? And the prophets, do they live for ever ? Human frailty is a truth so evident, that there needs no pomp of language to illustrate it, for daily experience sufficiently proves this, and we feel in ourselves the decays of weak nature. Since life it self is of so short a duration, and our present state like a flying shadow, it matters little what we suffer here, provided we are rendered fit for the divine reception, and the enjoyment of God's blessed presence, in the bright regions of glory, and endless felicity hereafter.

Search

(i) Search the terraqueous globe, and pick out some of its choicest delights, even those that are chiefly valued, and of the longest duration, are no other than mutable shadows, or faint representations, in comparison of him, who is the supreme felicity of our souls, and an object proportionable to their boundless desires. Were men convinced that God is a being of absolute goodness, who is eternally possessed of every perfection, and had withal a due sense of their own vileness, and their own imperfections; it would inwardly produce the lowest abasement of themselves, and the highest reverence, for God's adorable majesty. The firm belief of which, and constantly exercising these, or the like meditations, would, by the co-operating power of divine grace, deliver the soul from the fearful tyranny of sin, and all the excruciating miseries and direful consequences thereof. The time formerly wasted upon impertinent trifles, or in projecting imaginary schemes of felicity, is no longer spent upon such reproachful vanities, but infinitely better employed in penitential acts of devotion (*k*) and in fervent

(i) Were a man so possessed of terrestrial treasures that he had even acquired his utmost wishes, the prospect of some future supposed felicity, would tempt him to relinquish his present possessions, in hopes of finding what this created world, with all its perfections cannot yield; for the restless eye of his dissatisfied mind, will be prying beyond the heavens, and searching after some hidden excellencies: So it is impossible that the soul should rest, or that so divine a spark should cease rising, until it is joined to that immense flame of glory and majesty, from which it first proceeded.

(*k*) How far devotional addresses may influence the Deity, none can be absolutely certain, but this we may affirm, that those

fervent supplications to God for mercy, that they may participate of his heavenly blessings, and the unmerited gifts and graces of Christ's spiritual kingdom. In fine, adversity is an excellent school; and though few care to enter into it, yet the discipline thereof is such, as when patiently submitted to, will preserve us from everlasting perdition, and qualify us for a mansion in eternal glory, where there is nothing to embitter our pleasures, or render our glorious day unpleasant. Were these reflections duly attended to, the methods of providence would not seem too severe, and instead of impeaching the divine conduct, it much better becomes, such contumacious offenders, to offer in sacrifice their vices, and to acknowledge the incessant care, of the divine reprover, that from a feeling sense of his goodness, they may generously express the language of their hearts, and say, *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him in thy law, that thou mayest give him patience in time of adversity; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption; O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men, Psal. xxxi. 19.*

Thus have I shewn the advantages of afflictions in general. Secondly, shall make it my business to enquire,

those addresses sensibly affect rational beings, and often draw their affections from the world, and introduce the love of heaven into their souls. Besides, as he is proclaimed a God hearing prayer, so we have great reason to believe, that if we ask agreeably to his will, he hears our requests, and will answer our humble petitions.

enquire, what those laws were, which *David* attained the knowledge of, by being afflicted. Considerations on the infinite distance, and disproportion between the creature, and the creator, will strike the mind with awful ideas, and instruct us in the nature of that worship, which the high and lofty one, that inhabits eternity requires, and therefore, we should exert our best powers, employ every faculty of our (1) souls, and see that all our sacrifices of prayer, and praises which we present unto the Deity, be such as are agreeable, to his all-comprehending mind; because, no service, be it ever so amazingly grand, or its ceremonies the most punctually observed, will not be regarded by him, except those ceremonies are spiritually performed, and those sacrifices ascend from the altar of a purified heart. He that is clothed in robes of light, and encircled with myriads of glorious angels, wants not the vanishing praises of his creatures, nor any of their fading breath, to proclaim his excellencies. No, God that is eternally blessed in himself, and possessed with an everlasting crown of ineffable glory, values no offerings, like those of heavenly affections, and such

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(1) Our souls are of such an nature, that they can extend their thoughts, till they are quite lost, in the oceans of immensity and eternity. They not only acquaint themselves with the material part of the world, but also with the immaterial. From contemplating themselves, they enlarge their thoughts to other beings of the same kind. They discern the spirits of other men, through the veil of their bodies, and find out, and contemplate an unknown, and innumerable number of spiritual natures, till at last they ascend to God himself, that infinite spirit, who was, and is the maker, and preserver of us all.

as glow with love, and universal benevolence : in comparison of which, God pronounces his own institutions not good ; that is, considered in themselves, or when separated from moral goodness, they are of no real worth : but all their excellency is derived from their being the means appointed, to preserve the knowledge of himself, and keep mankind in subjection to his righteous and holy laws (*m*).

In support of these equitable commands, the jewish institutes were ordained ; and was every part of the hebrew ritual scrutinized, it would appear a regular system, admirably adapted to the genius of that (*n*) stubborn people, and to maintain

(*m*) These observations on the Hebrew ritual, are not offered as proofs of its divinity ; that I have taken for granted, all that I intended by them, was to declare the genuine design of the ritual : for though at this distance of time, some of its ceremonies are difficult to be accounted for, yet this may be evidently proved, that moral precepts, are interwoven throughout the ritual, and the whole calculated, to promote the honour, and glory of God ; the universal peace, and happiness of mankind. A judicious and learned author observes, that though the ritual taught, JEHOVAH was so present with his people *Israel*, as he was not with any other people ; yet it never taught, the presence of JEHOVAH was confined to the temple ; or as some have very unfairly represented it, that the God of *Israel* was a local God, or a circumscribed Deity. See LOMAN's *hebrew ritual*, p. 276. Dr. LIGHTFOOT's *temple service*, c. 9.

(*n*) Dr. South, speaking of the *Israelites* ingratitude, and their abuse of divine mercies, says, in his ludicrous language, they were all along a cross, odd, untoward sort of people, and such as God seems to have espoused to himself, upon the very same account that *Socrates* did *Xantippe*, only for her extreme ill-condition, above all that he could possibly find, or pick out of that sex, and so both the fittest to exercise, and to declare his admirable patience to the world. Vol. I. p. 421.
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tain a suitable reverence, and filial deportment, towards the majesty of God. And though these ritual injunctions, were highly regarded, yet they were not esteemed, equal to justice and mercy : but only respected as instruments to promote unalterable truth, and righteousness, that men might yield unfeigned obedience to God, and acknowledge him as the supreme Lord, and moral governor of the universe.

It is clear to every unbiassed mind, that those laws, which the pious psalmist learned by afflictions, and which he bestowed such high encomiums on, were those laws that are coeval with the nature of man, or those unchangeable precepts of morality, which neither length of time can obliterate, nor alteration of circumstances in the creature cancel ; but these moral obligations are always the same, and will be what they were originally intended, a divine directory to free agents, to the final consummation of all things. For they prescribe what should be done, said, or thought, with respect to God, our neighbour, and ourselves, and to all the creatures God has made ; whether such as have existed from the beginning, or such as shall commence in any following period : these precepts have an immutable relation thereto, and are never unconnected with them. So that whoever shall make those commands his guide, and endeavour to resemble the Deity in

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holiness,

Were the *Israelites* of such a froward disposition, the ritual seems highly useful to such a people, to free them from the power of a perverse will, and to give them the utmost aversion to superstition, and idolatry. See them fully described in the Jewish Antiq. D. Burnet's *Archæolo. Phil.* Dr. Spencer's *de legibus Hebræor.*

holiness, will always find a safe retreat in God, be delivered from many terrifying apprehensions within, be comforted under the greatest perplexities without, and the most afflicting scenes of providence. A view of our unhappy situation, and the evils that encompass us, would greatly distress the troubled mind, were there not a way through all these perplexities, to the fountain of life, and make the soul bitterly to cry out, what shall I do, to whom shall I fly for succour; I have experienced the insufficiency of all earthly enjoyments, and found them too weak, too deceivable, to be relied on, or trusted to, and therefore, I have renounced these deceitful vanities, and am effectually taught by afflictions, not to depend upon any earthly possessions, but wholly to rest my soul upon God, who is a sure refuge in time of trouble, and never to expect durable happiness, or meet with uninterrupted felicity, until I arrive at the pure regions of light and immortality above. Holy *David*, sensible of these things, and the impossibility of acquiring the divine approbation, without adhering to the refining rules of virtue, preferred, the constant observation of those sublime rules, infinitely before thousands of gold or silver, or whatever the bowels of the earth can produce, or the tempting treasures of a fleeting world afford; and therefore, had recourse to them in his troubles, and in all the intricate passages of his life (o). Moreover, he affirms from his

(o) Agreeably to which, says the sagacious Mr. LOCKE, in a letter to an intimate friend, written a little before, but ordered, not to be sent till after his death. "May you live long."

his own experience, that the pleasures which result from obedience, and a constant sense of God's perpetual presence, are of so durable, and so elevating a nature, that even in the heavy storms of persecution, those pleasures caused such joy, and rejoicing in his soul, as made him admire the divine munificence, and sometimes to break out in raptures of love, and to celebrate the praises of him, whose glory shines in heaven, and whose goodness is visibly displayed on earth, in changing the affections of sinful men, and in restoring lapsed creatures to their native freedom. *The law of the Lord is an undefiled law, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom unto the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoice the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth light unto the eyes; the law of God is in his heart, and his goings shall not slide. As concerning thy testimonies*

long, and happy in the enjoyment of health, freedom, content, and all those blessings, which providence has bestowed on you, and your virtue entitles you to; I know you loved me living, and will preserve my memory now I am dead; all the use to be made of it, is, that this world is a scene of vanity, that soon passes away, and affords no solid satisfaction, but the consciousness of doing well, and the hopes of another life. This is what I can say by experience, and what you will find when you come to make up your account; adieu, I leave my best wishes with you. J. LOCKE."

God has demonstrated to every man by implanted knowledge, and natural judgment, and the admonitions of the law, how the possession of riches is not everlasting; the ornament of beauty is not perpetual; our strength and force are soon dissolved, and that all is vapour, and vanity; and that only the good conscience of faith unfeigned, passes through the midst of the heavens, and returning to truth, takes hold of the right hand of that joy which is to come. Apostolical Constitutions, lib. vii. 33.

simonies I have known long since, that thou hast founded them for ever, and that they are done in truth and equity. These scriptures abundantly confirm, what I have already advanced, that the law which the psalmist boasts of, and which he professes to receive such lasting comfort from, that no terrene enjoyments bear any comparison to it; was the law written in his heart, and woven in every part of his frame; and therefore more needs not be said to prove it, because nothing is clearer to men acquainted with themselves, that without the inherent principles of virtue, and constantly obeying the sacred dictates of religion, there is no relief for a wounded spirit, nor any support for a soul oppressed with darkness, or overwhelmed with the black ideas of misery and sorrow. I shall now draw such inferences from what has been said, as tend to make us patient under sufferings, and to improve our minds, in heavenly knowledge.

Were the benevolent purposes of providence, and the compassionate care of omnipotence, duly regarded, and justly illustrated, we should discern such astonishing scenes of goodness, as would not only silence the clamours of guilty creatures, and hinder them from perpetrating their evil devices, but would also, constrain them to reverence him, whose power and goodness are continually exerted in their preservation, and to say with holy Job, *I am vile in thy sight, what shall I answer? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, and make no complaint against my God.* Whenever we are visited with sickness, or confined to beds of languishing; instead of impiously reflecting upon
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our creator, it is infinitely more rational, to forsake those evils, which were the causes of our sufferings, than to revile our heavenly father's chastisements. *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth; if ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence, shall we not much rather be in subjection to the father of spirits, and live? For they, verily, for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, it afterwards yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby.* Heb. xii.

Nothing can more beautifully illustrate almighty power, or more pathetically display paternal affection, than those moving passages of sacred writ; and therefore we should keep a holy jealousy over ourselves, and patiently wait God's just determinations, since he does not wound us as an enemy, but does mercifully correct us as a friend. And though clouds and darkness are round about his throne, yet we are certain, that righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his seat.

Lastly, I would infer, that since afflictions are designed to awaken the attention, and to procure convenient season for reflection, we should destroy the sting of those chastisements, by repentance, and employ those opportunities in learning heavenly wisdom, the knowledge of which will
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cause men to turn their eyes inward, that they may see the disorderly state of their souls, and the necessity of regulating the intellectual oeconomy; for when the superior faculties move regularly, and the inferior appetites act under their direction, there arises such a complacency in the mind, as infinitely exceeds the greatest bodily delights, and the highest quintessence of worldly pleasures; nay there is a kind of spiritual fragrancy upon the conscience, when it is daily watered with virtuous actions, with the refreshing springs of true devotion, and the divine dews of celestial grace.

To conclude, let us look up to Jesus for help, to the God of consolation for mercy, and perform those promises we made in our distress, and in the very bitterness of our souls, that our names may be written in the book of life, and our repentance recorded in the annals of eternity. By thus wisely improving our time, and by keeping a just balance among the inward affections, we shall commence citizens of that kingdom, where immortal spirits are arrayed in robes of spotless purity, and the christian moralist shines in inimitable beauty, and in unchangeable and never-ending glory. This happiness was originally designed for us, and would we be partakers of it, we must submit to the guidance of a merciful Saviour, who will lead us safely through this hazardous state, and bring us with joy and triumph to our heavenly home, and to our blessed inheritance. 12 JY 62

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